

## Fontenelle Climax of Long List of Hotels in Omaha

**T**HE other evening, when Donald Allan got out an old register of the Herndon House of fifty years ago, it reminded him of the lines of James Whitcomb Riley: "As one who sits at even time o'er an album, all alone, and musing upon the faces of the friends that e have known."

Mr. Allan is the son of the late J. T. Allan, proprietor of the old Herndon House, Omaha's leading hostelry when in its heyday. The son has preserved an old register bearing the dates of fifty years ago. The names are of persons who have since gained prominence in local and national affairs, and some who mounted the heights of world-wide fame.

There are some living in Omaha today who can close their eyes and in fancy go back half a century to the days of the city's genesis. The forthcoming opening of Omaha's palatial hotel brings back to mind the many changes in hotel affairs since the time the steamboat's siren aroused the hotel men of the city to a state of anticipatory glee.

### Back to Old Days.

It is, indeed, a far cry from hotel life here fifty years ago to the present-day sumptuousness of the big hotels. To get an intelligent retrospection of hotel life in Omaha fifty years ago, it must be remembered that there were no railroads into the city. Such accommodations as telephones, steam heat, linens, busses, running water, in rooms and elevators were not to be had. This city was just getting a start. The steamboat landing was a short distance south of the Herndon House, at Ninth and Farnam streets.

The postoffice was at Fourteenth and Farnam, next door east of the present Union Pacific city ticket office. Twelfth street was the principal business thoroughfare. The steamboats delivered both passenger and freight. Freighters took their supplies from here overland in wagons as far as Salt Lake City and Virginia City. The town was rather "western." Gold dust was received in payment for supplies. Indians were familiar sights on the streets.

Donald Allan was born in the Herndon House during his father's management of the place. He is storekeeper for the Union Pacific, and resides at 837 Thirty-seventh street. An hour or so spent over the old register he cherishes yielded many reminiscences of historical value.

### Steamers Register.

An interesting entry on the old Herndon register reads: "Steamer Deer Lodge, for Fort Benton, Monday, 27th, 3 p. m. Steamer Benton, for Fort Benton, Tuesday, 28th, 10 a. m. Steamer Montana, for St. Louis, Sunday, 29th, 4 p. m." It was the custom for hotel clerks to note the departures of steamers for the information of the public. There was much river traffic those days between St. Louis and St. Joseph and Omaha.

Turning over the pages of the register the name of C. E. Yost is noted under date of March 22, 1865. The signature is much the same as that of today. R. S. Caldwell, father of Victor B. Caldwell, president of the United States National bank, registered on the day mentioned. He brought his bride here from the east and stopped at the Herndon for quite a while. Victor B. Caldwell was born at the Herndon.

**Brother of Mrs. Cleveland.**  
B. H. Polson was a guest during March of 1865. He was a brother of Mrs. Grover Cleveland. The Polsons had property interests here. Against the registration of William Wallace, at present an officer of the Omaha National bank, was the word "Fire," meaning that he wanted a little warmth in his room. Hotel warmth in those halcyon days consisted of a wood fire and the cost was extra. It was something of a luxury. R. C. Clowry registered as captain and acting quartermaster, U. S. V., St. Louis. He since rose to the head of the Western Union Telegraph company and is well known here.

The names of Henry Fontenelle of Decatur, Nebraska Territory; Joseph Lefebvre, Little Chief, Standing Hawk, No Knife, Whirling Thunder and White Breast are also seen in the old book.

Other guests at that time were J. E. Boyd, since governor of Nebraska, and builder of the theater bearing his name; Horace M. Boies of Iowa, C. Childs, Milton Barlow, St. A. D. Balcombe and General J. M. Thayer, later governor of this state.

**First U. P. Engineer.**  
The name of Peter A. Dey of Iowa City, Ia., recalls an incident. Dey was the first chief engineer of the Union Pacific. His original line of survey included the present Lane cut-off, and it is said that he resigned because the company would not accept his Lane cut-off idea. This cut-off was accomplished in recent years.

General G. M. Dodge of Council Bluffs is authority for this bit of historical information.

Another entry is that of F. L. Coudoch, who was principal agent for the Yankee Robinson show. Harry Fuller signed as principal clown of the show, and Yankee Robinson was here in person.

J. J. Ingalls of Atchison, Kan., who wrote the immortal poem, "Opportunity," signed his name on this register. The names of E. Estabrook, Lorenzo Crounse, Lieutenant Colonel A. S. Curtis, Major General E. R. Coryn, Ben Gallagher, P. W. Hitchcock, Thomas C. Durant of New York, D. H. Wheeler of Pawnee Agency, H. T. Clarke of Bellevue and Dr. R. C. Moore may be seen. Dr. R. C. Moore practiced here until a few years ago. Durant was identified with the Union Pacific. H. T. Clarke founded Bellevue college. Wheeler, Snyder, first purchasing agent for the Union Pacific, was another guest.

James A. Evans, locating engineer for the Union Pacific, inscribed his name. He was killed by the Indians in Wyoming. Evans Pass, Wyo., was named for him. J. L. Redick and sons is another entry.

**Other Noted Names.**  
Other names noted are: Sidney Dillon, president of the Union Pacific; Lieutenant William Coburn, afterward United States marshal here; J. E. Casement, in charge of track laying for the Union Pacific; and who was with Sherman and G. M. Dodge in the civil war; J. Sterling Morton, founder of Arbor day; E. K. Valentine of Iowa cavalry, afterward congressman; David Butler, later governor; W. J. Bronch, U. S. A.; James A. Kirk of Chicago, soap man; George Francis Train, wife and daughter.

No title for Sherman.  
W. T. Sherman signed his name without any title and in a small, neat style. His entourage all affixed their military rank.

Mention of the Herndon House without reference to the George Francis Train incident would be uncouth. Train, who was uncle of George P. Rema, former mayor of Omaha, was known for his eccentricities. He was eating dinner with a party of friends at the Herndon, when a draft from a broken



OMAHA'S EARLIEST HIGH GRADE HOTEL. THE INTERNATIONAL. AFTERWARDS THE HERNDON HOUSE, AT NINTH AND FARNAM, WHICH STILL LATER BECAME THE UNION PACIFIC HEADQUARTERS.

window annoyed him. He engaged a negro attendant to stand between him and the glass. When Proprietor J. T. Allan observed the negro thus employed, he asked him whether he was still working for the hotel or for Mr. Train. The guest heard the remark and took umbrage, with the announcement, more emphatic than polite, that he would build another hotel within sixty days and would see that there were no broken windows to annoy guests. He built the Cosens hotel in sixty days. Manager Billy Bryne of the Orpheum says that Train told him about the incident, and Donald Allan likewise vouches for it. It was just like Train.

**Miller and Richardson.**  
The Herndon House was built in 1867 by G. L. Miller and Lyman Richardson. It was the first large hotel built here. M. W. Kiehl was the first landlord, he being succeeded by J. T. Allan. After the Allan regime, Dr. G. C. Monell bought the property and leased it to a Mrs. Brownson.

The following letter about the Herndon House, was written by Elias Seymour, Union Pacific engineer, and was included in Savage's history of Omaha: "We found that the Herndon in Omaha was in a sort of transition state, and its guests, as farmers says, 'between hay and grass.' Our longtime friend and distinguished host, Mr. Allan, had been called upon by Dr. Monell, the landlord, to surrender its use and occupancy into the hands of Mrs. Brownson, who had recently leased it and stood ready to enter upon the duties of hostess as soon as Mr. Allan could find it convenient to vacate the premises, all of which the said Mr. Allan seemed in no haste to do. An entire week had been spent by the parties in strategy and legal skirmishing, during which it was not unusual for Mr. Allan to visit the kitchen in the morning and find Mrs. Brownson's cooking stove standing in the place of his, which had been thrown over the adjoining fence during the night, and not infrequently were the guests of the house stopped in the middle of a meal (while waiting, perhaps, for more warm cakes), by the intelligence that the stove had just been thrown out of the kitchen. Fortunately for us, however, it was outside the fence, when we arrived, and remained there during the following day and Sunday."

**Society News.**  
The Omaha Times of February 4, 1909, printed the following bit of society news concerning the Herndon: "At dinner last Thursday the guests of the Herndon house at the invitation of Hon. William A. West, prolonged their sitting for the purpose of testing the quality of a couple of baskets of excellent champagne. A number of toasts were proposed by Dr. G. L. Miller, Marshal West, Sydney Paddock, Judge E. Wakeley, Captain Moore, Mr. McConble, James Seeley, J. W. Paddock, Captain Curtis of the ferry company's steamer Nebraska and Joseph H. Millard."

So much for the old Herndon house. It outlived its usefulness and went the way of all things material. The building was changed and enlarged until it lost its identity and was taken by the Union Pacific for general offices.

**First Hotel.**  
Omaha's first hotel was known as the St. Nicholas, a log building 16x18, one

story and located at Twelfth and Jackson streets. As before stated Twelfth street was looking up as the business center, with Farnam street beginning to take notice of things. This primitive little hotel was erected by the Nebraska and Council Bluffs Ferry company and was first occupied by William P. Snowden and family. Mr. Snowden was known as "Uncle Billy." Snowden. He served as city marshal and died during the last few years. That was nearly sixty years ago, the beginning of Omaha history. A few of the pioneers remember the old St. Nicholas hotel.

After the construction of the Herndon, the Grand Central hotel, which occupied the present site of the Paxton, was the next hotel of any pretensions. The hotel was built on a quarter of a block, was four stories and of brick. It was commenced in 1871 and the money was raised by stock subscriptions among 100 individuals and firms. It was completed and opened during the fall of 1873. It was first named the Pullman, but after many protests were made the name was changed to Grand Central. The cost of this building exceeded first expectations, so a loan of \$100,000 was secured from Edward Creighton, A. J. Poppleton and others. In 1873 the hotel was sold to Augustus Kousine under foreclosure proceedings for \$120,000. George Thrall then took the lease, and he was succeeded by Charles W. James H. and Richard Kitchin. The Kitchens installed an elevator, the first in any Omaha hotel.

**Then Came the Paxton.**  
At 6:30 p. m. of September 24, 1875, fire was discovered in the elevator shaft of the Grand Central. The building was totally destroyed and five firemen lost their lives. The Paxton was built on the site of the old Grand Central and the Kitchens have maintained proprietorship ever since that time. The site cost \$30,000 in 1875.

Omaha once upon a time had a steamboat hotel. In a pamphlet entitled, "Omaha City, the Capital of Nebraska," James M. Woolworth stated in 1877: "A company of twelve gentlemen, largely interested in the town, have recently purchased for \$15,000 a steamboat of the first class—the Washington City—which is moored at the landing and used as a hotel. Cheap and comfortable accommodations are thus afforded to 220 persons. The necessity of large hotel accommodations may be inferred from the fact that there are now 1,000 people in Omaha over our population of last March. It is reasonable to expect this number will be considerably increased in two months."

**Hamilton House.**  
Notable among the early hosteries of the early days was the Hamilton House, built in 1856 on Douglas street, between Fourteenth and Fifteenth streets, by C. B. Smith, C. W. Hamilton and H. M. Judson. Mr. Burnham was the first proprietor. Mr. Judson brought his furniture in St. Louis and accompanied it by steamer, bringing six negro servants with him. Among his regular boarders were United States Marshal B. P. Rankin, Governor Cumins, Governor Richardson and John M. Thayer. The upper part of the Hamilton was arranged so that it might be cleared in short notice for ball room purposes. The music was furnished by Byron Reed, Aaron Cahn, Frederick A. Schneider and Washington Griffith.

and Fourteenth streets. It was built by W. A. Gwyer in 1853. St. John Goodrich, father of former City Comptroller Goodrich, was proprietor.

**Where Poppleton Lived.**  
The Douglas House was a two-story structure, the rear of which was of cottonwood slabs. A. J. Poppleton lived at the Douglas House for several years. Wells brothers were the first proprietors. "Aunt" Page, who died a few years ago at the Old People's home, was the widow of E. T. Page, proprietor of the Planters', at the northwest corner of Sixteenth and Dodge streets. In its day the Planters' had quite a vogue. The motherly attentions of Aunt Page won many friends for the Planters'. It was first known as the Morrison. The building was erected by Captain Faris, related to Mrs. Grover Cleveland.

The Metropolitan was erected in 1885 by D. A. Van Namee. In 1896 the Pacific House, on Tenth, between Capitol avenue and Davenport street, was built by D. T. Mount. The Union hotel, a two-story structure, was established in 1880 by William G. Flitcoe at the northwest corner of Fifteenth and Dodge streets. The Millard was erected in 1882 by a syndicate including Samuel Shears, J. E. Markel, Thomas Swobe, Ezra Millard, J. H. Markel and George Giacomini.

**Workmen's Home.**  
The old Doran House, which stood for many years at the southeast corner of Tenth and Farnam streets, had a history peculiarly its own. It served as a sort of a social center for the mechanics, who made this their permanent home. Many of the guests were employed at the Union Pacific shops. Dr. Doran and his wife were in charge. There was not much style, but there was plenty of good food and cheer. Life was worth living at the Doran. The place was a center of local political activity.

The building was of three stories and had an old-fashioned gable roof. There was a general washroom, and lanterns in the hallways guided the boarders to their rooms. A bracket lamp adorned the wall of the office, and in winter time a large wood-burning stove shed warmth upon all who gathered around its rotund body. There were dances, checker games, and no one at the Doran complained of ennui. Occasionally there were musical functions. Dr. Doran died and Mrs. Doran married P. H. Carey, one of the boarders. The name of the place was changed to Carey, and in the course of time the hotel was moved to Eighteenth and Howard streets. The old building was torn down about two years ago to make way for a modern structure.

From the St. Nicholas, nearly sixty years ago, to the Fontenelle of today! This period of time covers practically all of the history of Omaha. From a rude structure, 16x18, to the imposing building

at Eighteenth and Douglas streets, stirs the imagination of those who have watched Omaha grow.

What will it be fifty or sixty years hence?

**Hoodoo Number 13 is Not Used at the Fontenelle Hotel**

A number has been excluded from the Fontenelle hotel. A number of what? Of nothing. Just a number. It is the number "13." In all the beautiful hotel you can't find a room 13. On each floor the num-

bers progress steadily from 1 to 12, and there they halt, they shy, they skip over the fatal numeral. Then on they go starting with 14 and using such as the succeeding number of good repute as they need. Even 21 is not omitted.

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